

Rediscovering the Heart of Blacksburg

A Master Plan for Downtown



Final Report

Completed By:
The Blacksburg Collaborative
MCA Urban Planning
LDR International, Inc.
Communitas

August 31, 2001

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MCA Urban Planning
5 Century Drive, Suite 210
Greenville, South Carolina 29606
864.232.8204

LDR International an HNTB Company
9175 Guilford Road
Columbia, Maryland 21046
410.792.4360

Communitas
157 East Main Street, Suite 302
Rock Hill, South Carolina 29730
803.366.6374

August 31, 2001

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of the plan is to develop a long-range vision for the future of Downtown Blacksburg as the heart of a vibrant community. Downtown remains home to many of the major civic functions of the community, many of its oldest religious institutions, and the largest collection of one-of-a-kind retail offerings in the New River Valley region. Downtown is also the place where the interface of Virginia Tech and the community is most visible. This presents a unique opportunity to capitalize on the assets of being a university town while providing enhanced facilities for *all* of the citizens of the community.

1.2 Process

The *Rediscovering the Heart of Blacksburg* plan involved over six months of intensive community interaction, research, design, and synthesis. It began with a rigorous community interaction process that included individual and stakeholder interviews, and meetings with the Downtown Advisory Group steering committee comprised of representatives of the business community, active community groups, Virginia Tech, and the Town of Blacksburg. This process culminated with a town hall meeting designed to garner input from Blacksburg citizens. This information was summarized into a "Strategic Assessment" memorandum that profiled the input received during the process. This memorandum is included in its entirety in an appendix to this report.

The community interaction process was occurring simultaneously with an exhaustive physical analysis of Blacksburg and a review of existing documentation. This research was occurring concurrently with an Economic Development report being completed by RKG Associates of Alexandria, Virginia.

With a thorough assessment of the community completed, the team embarked on the planning process, which included the development of strategies for downtown and complementary designs as well as a series of marketing materials. This information was presented to both the Downtown Advisory Group and the general public for review and comment in a presentation in January.

The review process and subsequent comments were used to develop further refinements to the final plan that included design revisions and strategy development. At this point, projects were prioritized, responsibilities assigned, and time frames were created in order to develop a complete implementation strategy and action plan for Blacksburg.

1.3 Report Format

The master plan report is designed to present the findings of the Master Plan in a brief and easy to understand format. It relates all of the Master Plan recommendations to six strategies for the future, each of which contains important steps in implementing the Master Plan. These implementation steps are presented as short, medium and, where necessary, long-term improvements. Many of the recommendations relate to the illustrative Master Plan shown in Exhibit 1 on the following page. Throughout the document, the Master Plan will be referenced and examples given in exhibits. Where necessary, detailed information on topics will be covered in appendices at the end of the document.

The report concludes with an implementation strategy and action plan designed to outline the steps needed to begin implementation. This strategy is summarized in a “Strategy Board” which distills all of the recommendations of the Master Plan into a one-sheet document.

1.4 Acknowledgments

This plan could not have been completed without the help of many groups and individuals. The Downtown Advisory Group steered this process from beginning to end. Their dedication to the future of Downtown Blacksburg deserves the gratitude of the whole community. The Town of Blacksburg and Virginia Tech have been particularly helpful throughout this process. Each organization’s ‘open door’ policy bodes well for the future of the downtown. The Townscape Committee and the Design Review Board members were excellent resources for our design team. Special thanks go to Donna Dunay of the Townscape Committee for allowing us to use her exhaustive book on the history of the Town. Most importantly, however, are the citizens of Blacksburg whose interest in this process has been the most critical component to plan’s completion.

Exhibit 1: The Master Plan for
Blacksburg

[Click here to see Exhibit 1](#)